

MENA Solidarity Network

Solidarity with workers in the Middle East and North Africa menasolidaritynetwork.com Spring 2012



Mena Bahrain Bulletin — a call for solidarity

Defend Bahraini trade unions

The uprising in Bahrain began on 14 February 2011. Inspired by the uprisings across the Arab world protesters called for an elected government, civil liberties and social justice. The Bahraini government responded with brutal repression, and by February 2012 the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights had documented at least 65 killings, 1866 cases of torture, 500 prisoners of conscience, 500 exiled and three men on death row.

Despite this repression, the UK government approved £1.3 million of military equipment to Bahrain in the third quarter of 2011, as well as £1 million to Saudi Arabia, who sent troops to Bahrain in British-made trucks to crush the protests.

Since the beginning of 2012, at least ten people have been killed by the security forces, three in police custody and a number of others suffocating on tear gas fired into homes. On 14 February 2012 protesters took to the streets of the capital Manama to mark one year since the uprising. Many came from the impoverished villages that surround Manama such as Sanabis, Deih and Jidhafs.

Armed police flooded these villages before the protests and fired rubber bullets and tear gas at protesters. Protestors were prevented from reaching the Pearl roundabout in central Manama.

Strike calls in the 2011 uprising

The General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GFBTU) brings together 70 trade unions and represents around 20,000 workers. On 19 February 2011 the GFBTU condemned the attacks on demonstrators and called for a general strike the following day, demanding the withdrawal of the security forces.

The Bahraini Teachers' Association (BTA) issued a similar statement and called on teachers to join a strike calling for a constitutional monarchy, an elected government and for those responsible for killing civilians to be held accountable.

The GFBTU and BTA called off the strikes after the security forces made a temporary withdrawal, but attacks and victimisations of trade unionists increased over the following weeks. Another call for a general strike on 14 March by GFBTU was supported by the shipyard workers' union, the BTA and other unions.

After a week, the federation leadership called off the strike after having received assurances from the government that workers would not be victimised for taking part.

Victimisation

Bahraini Government promises to respect workers' rights to strike and peaceful protest clearly meant little. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report into the protests and repression received complaints from more than 1,600 workers who had been either sacked, suspended or victimised in relation to the uprising.

These included harrowing testimonies from trade unionists,

such as a woman teacher who was thrown into detention, left blindfolded for hours and subjected to abuse because she is Shi'a Muslim. She was then accused of organising illegal strikes and sacked. Read the full damning report of the BICI online here: <http://www.bici.org/bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>

Jail for union leaders

Nurses: Rula al-Saffar is head of the nurses union in Bahrain. Last year she was sentenced to 15 years in prison by a military court along with 19 other medical workers. Their 'crime' was to treat injured protesters. The medics were convicted on the basis of confessions extracted through torture. The Royal College of Nursing and Physicians for Human Rights have condemned the imprisonment of Rula and her colleagues.

Teachers Mahdi Abu Deeb is the president of the teachers' union. He and other teaching union leaders were arrested for organising a strike against the government's violent repression of the pro-democracy protests. Mahdi and other teachers were sentenced by a military court to between three and ten years imprisonment.

On 12 February, Mahdi started a hunger strike calling for the release of all political prisoners. The International Trade Union Confederation estimates that hundreds of teachers who participated in strikes and demonstrations have been dismissed or targeted for other retaliation by the government.

What you can do

- Email the Business secretary Vince Cable to demand an end to all arms sales to Bahrain: enquiry.enquiry@bis.gsi.gov.uk
- Email the Foreign Secretary William Hague (haguew@parliament.uk) and Bahraini Minister of Human Rights and Social Development, Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al Balooshi, (pr@social.gov.bh) and demand the immediate release of all Bahraini political prisoners.
- Email your MP to urge them to support Early Day Motion 2166 before it closes in May 2012. The motion calls for an end to arms sales to repressive regimes, including Saudi Arabia, which played a key role in suppressing the Bahraini uprising.
- Send a message of support to the imprisoned medics. Email: dominic@bahrainjdm.org
- Sign and share the ipetition in support of the medics: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/freebahrainmedics/>
- Invite a speaker to talk about Bahrain at your next union meeting. Email: menasolidarity@gmail.com
- Join MENA Solidarity Network. Go to: <http://menasolidaritynetwork.com/get-active/>

Become part of the
Mena Solidarity Network

- Invite a speaker from MENA Solidarity Network. Contact Andy on 07703 058770, email menasolidarity@gmail.com
- For details of campaigns go to menasolidaritynetwork.com

Slave labour in the UK and death in Bahrain

Julian Browne is a special advisor to Carlyle groups Aerospace and Defence section, which owns Combined Systems Inc. (CSI). CSI produces and sells tear gas to the Bahraini, Egyptian and Israeli governments.

Many people in Bahrain have suffered, and some have died, from tear gas suffocation. In Egypt and Palestine protesters have also died from tear gas suffocation and being hit by tear gas canisters. (Pic: protesters help a friend overcome by tear gas inhalation)

Browne happens to be a special advisor to controversial 'workfare' company A4e which profits from making young unemployed people work for giant multinational corporations for no pay.

● Find out more about how Britain is arming repression in the Middle East from Campaign Against Arms Trade. Go to <http://www.caat.org.uk/>



Model resolution on Bahrain for union branches/Trades Councils

1. **This branch notes the continuing protests in Bahrain for democracy and social justice. We recognize and support the Bahraini people's demands for a fully democratic government, freedom of speech and assembly, an independent judiciary, free and independent trade unions, and basic social rights such as a living wage, affordable housing and secure employment.**
2. **This branch further notes the wrongful imprisonment and torture of ordinary Bahrainis, including medics, teachers and academics, merely for protesting for basic democratic rights and treating injured protesters.**
3. **This branch also notes the failure of the UK government to take effective and meaningful action in support of democracy and human rights in Bahrain.**
4. **This branch therefore calls for:**
 - a. The immediate release of, and dropping of all charges against, all those imprisoned for protesting for democracy and social justice in Bahrain.
 - b. An end to all UK arms sales to Bahrain.
 - c. The UK trade union movement, and in particular the education and health unions, to organise a campaign of solidarity with the imprisoned medics, teachers and other political prisoners in Bahrain.
5. **This branch further resolves:**
 - a. To send a message of solidarity to political prisoners in Bahrain.
 - b. To write to the Foreign secretary William Hague demanding an end to arms sales to Bahrain and the immediate release of all political prisoners.
 - c. To circulate information about the situation in Bahrain amongst our members.
 - d. To affiliate to Solidarity with MENA Workers Network at a cost of £25.

MENA Solidarity Network

Solidarity with workers in the Middle East and North Africa



Solidarity with MENA Workers Network

We are a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity links with workers in the Middle East and North Africa in support of their struggle for social justice and workers' rights.

Founding statement

We celebrate the heroic struggles of workers in Middle East and North Africa (Mena) who have played a vital role in bringing down tyrants across the region. We support their continuing battles for genuine democracy and social justice.

We agree to help their campaigns for the right to strike and other basic social and democratic rights, for unions free from state control, and for well-paid and secure jobs.

Supporting organisations include: RMT London Region, Cambridgeshire Trades Council, Manchester TUC and the UCU.

Get involved

To get involved, or find out more about solidarity work, please email: menasolidarity@gmail.com or visit menasolidaritynetwork.com